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SINGLENESSE OF AIM, THE CRITERION OF
MINISTERIAL FAITHFULNESS.

A SERMON

PREACHED AT THE VISITATION

OF THE

Lord Bishop of Lichfield,

HELD AT BAKEWELL,

JULY 14, 1853;

BY

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Vicar of Edensor ; Domestic Chaplain to His Grace the Duke of Devonshire.

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WHEN the request was made, at the Visitation, that the following Sermon might be printed, the Preacher ventured to excuse himself from complying with it, on the ground that the field of published sermons was too widely occupied to justify additions from ordinary sources. The request, however, has been followed by private representations from some of the Clergy then present, to which he feels bound at once to defer,—and he puts it forth in the hope that any little good which they have anticipated from its publication may be realized.

A S E R M O N.

MATT. vi. 22, 23.

“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

“But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness.”

THE sense of these words can be gathered only from a close attention to the context. Our Lord had been speaking of three of the chief acts of the religious life—almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. In each case, He said, the true worth of the act would be determined by the motive. The Pharisees did them “to be seen of men.” They “*had* their reward” in the praise they coveted. His disciples were to do them to be seen of God alone. Their reward would be yet to come. The different rewards thus aimed at are described in the verse preceding the text as “treasures laid up”—the one “on earth,” the other “in heaven;” and in the verse following the text the irreconcilableness of the two is set forth under another figure,—the impossibility of “serving two masters, God and Mammon.” The meaning of the intervening illustration, therefore, for such

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it is, is at once fixed :—what the eye is to the body, its medium of light (λύχνος), that the motive—the thing *aimed* or *looked* at—is to the whole course of life. If the motive be single and right, the whole course is full of light (Θῶς). If the motive be wrong, the whole course is full of darkness ; a darkness which attains to its greatest intensity in those who have previously had the light.

That the words, though spoken generally, had a special reference to the future *ministers of the Gospel* may well be inferred. Not to mention that our Lord was addressing those from whom the Twelve had just been chosen, and from whom the Seventy were mainly to be taken, it is obvious that what was true of ordinary Christians and their religious acts, would be true in a higher degree of the ministry which was to comprise within itself the whole circle of those acts :—the value of all would be determined by *the motive* which lay beneath them. And it is this subject,—*the necessity of singleness of motive in the ministry*, that I propose to bring before you to day.

I have selected it not without a consciousness that many more attractive ones were thus being passed by. In an age in which the Church is rapidly entering into new combinations,—when science, on the one hand, is daily furnishing fresh facts to assist in the interpretation of Holy Writ, and a sharpened intellect, on the other, is preparing to put the very inspiration of Scripture to the severest test ; when education has scarcely passed from the region of pure experiment ; and the embers of an expiring controversy are still, at intervals, shooting up their angry flames ; and spiritual delusions, in new and monstrous forms, are rearing their heads among us,—there are topics enough of present ministerial interest, to throw all ordinary ones into the shade. But the subject I have chosen seems to present itself here with an appropriateness which is independent of all circumstances, and will survive all time. We are met together, nominally at least, to give account of ourselves to

him who has been set over us as bishop and overseer of the flock of Christ. It is but the foreshadowing of another and greater gathering, when we shall answer to the summons of the Chief Shepherd of all. Then when our fellow Christians are receiving their judgment as *men*, we shall be waiting for our additional one as *ministers*. And that on which the verdict will hang will be—the manifestation indeed of the outer life which we have led, but this interpreted by the revelation of the inner man of the heart. It is well that at times like this we should anticipate the verdict, by turning our gaze inwards. Who is the true Lord before whom, consciously or unconsciously, we are bowing down?

The text, then, places before us in broad contrast,—

First, The *directly opposite motives* by which we may be influenced in our ministry.

Secondly, The *effect* of these, (respectively,) upon our *whole ministerial course*.

I. And first, the motives themselves.

What the single and right one is, it is hardly necessary I should mention here. It is *the love of Christ*, brought home with power to our own hearts as penitent sinners, constraining us—by the love we bear to him in return, and to our fellow men for his sake—by our recorded vows—by our accepted responsibilities, to labour for the souls he died to save; and encouraging us with the hope of the unspeakable rewards he will give us at his appearing. A motive, to one who has realized eternity, capable, it would be thought, of engrossing every affection and determining the whole life!

But, in opposition to it, first essaying to share its sway, and, if admitted, soon prevailing to usurp it, appears the double and evil motive. Shortly, it is *the love of the present world*. In detail, it is the several forms which that love can assume.

The love of money—not for itself, but for the rank it gives, and the enjoyment it procures: the vain-glory of the world—the coveting its praises, the thirsting after its power, the eager wish to be well spoken of by all: the sensuality of the world,—in its milder aspect the love of ease, or pleasures, or domestic enjoyments; in its grosser one, the indulgence of fleshly lusts.

Of each examples are given in Holy Scripture; of their power, in the hands of the Tempter, to sap ministerial faithfulness, and ensure ministerial ruin. Of the simple covetousness, Judas; clutching his unhallowed gains—the bag from which he pilfered,¹ and the thirty pieces of silver which he received. Of its higher form, Balaam; dazzled by the proffered honours of the court of Moab, unable to resist “the princes more and more honourable”² that came, and so, forsaking the right way; and with him Diotrephes, who “loved to have the pre-eminence.”³ Of the sensuality, Demas;⁴ shrinking from the path of hardness that he might return to a life of ease; and Hophni and Phinehas⁵ passing from ease into licentiousness, defiling the Lord’s people at the door of the congregation.

Of each examples are given; of each the type, we cannot doubt, is being faithfully reproduced. And this with the distinct individuality which, now as then, attaches to the personal life of each of us. For my temptation, Reverend Brethren, is not your’s, nor your’s mine. It is probable we bring, each one of us, the seeds of our future trial, born with us into the world. It is certain that early influences,—parental training or the want of it,—leave on us their distinct impress; and our strongly marked tendencies are brought with us into orders. And upon these the Tempter works. For a time they may be

(1) John xii. 6.

(2) Numbers xxii. 15.

(3) 3 John 9.

(4) 2 Tim. iv. 10.

(5) 1 Sam. xi. 22.

kept in abeyance. Youthful zeal, the sacredness of our new position, the very gift conveyed to us by the laying on of hands, all combine for a while to bring the world beneath our feet. It is the flood time of holy effort. And if I pause for a moment, it is to remind my younger brethren in the ministry that taken at its flood—the absolute and unreserved surrender of themselves *then* made, the one true motive distinctly realized, and all lower ones distinctly renounced,—a vantage ground is gained for their future conflict, inappreciable in its extent but to those who have made the trial, and have endured somewhat of the hardness of the fight.

But often it is not embraced as it should be ; and then, after a time, the *second motive* begins to appear. The grace of orders has not eradicated nature's taint ; and, not watched against, the inferior aim is first admitted as a parallel one ; and the parallel one ere long predominates. Outwardly, there may be no sign to indicate to us that we are missing the right way. Zeal, fervour, self-denial, the natural gifts of eloquence—talent—the power of influencing others, all may consist with divided affections and an impure aim. To the single-minded labourer they are the tribute which he daily lays upon the altar of God. To the double-minded they are the incense which unconsciously he is offering to *self*. Zeal for our own opinions,—our party,—our church, will simulate zeal for the glory of God. Self-love or self advancement may be the moving spring, when we are seeming, to ourselves and others, to do great things for Him. Our very strictness of life, in an age which happily demands strictness of its ministry, and applauds it, *may* be but a refined worldliness—an intense longing to have praise of men. “Come with me and see my zeal for the Lord,”¹ said Jehu to Jehonadab the son of Rechab. It seemed no idle boast. He did the Lord's work, and did it well. But self was at the

(1) 2 Kings x. 16.

bottom of all. He was weighed in the balance and found wanting. The defective motive, stripped the action of all its meretricious glare, and revealed the doer of it, in the eyes of a heart-searching God, at best but a lover of the world.

II. I pass on then to the second point which the text sets forth, *The effect which these separate motives will have upon our ministerial life.*

1. And first, if the motive be the single—heavenly—one, “*the whole course will be full of light.*”

The force of the metaphor must not be missed. What the sun is to the world of nature, that God is declared to be to the world of grace. “God ¹ is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.” God in Christ, therefore, the revelation of that light to us. “That was the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” ² To be “full of light,” then, is, in truth, to be filled with *Him*. It is, in our measure, to see as He saw and to speak as He spake. It is to have the spiritual vision gradually cleared from the film of sin, till his unwritten book of nature, as page by page its secrets are unfolded to us, becomes instinct with evidences of his wisdom, power, and love; and his written word discloses to us, more and more clearly, as we are able to bear them, the “deep things” of Him; and, then, speaking out of the abundance of an enlightened heart, to lead others on to the paths we have ourselves explored. And none are thus purged but those whose faces are turned full on Him. It is “the pure in heart” that alone can “see God.” ³

But it is more than this. It is to labour as He laboured, and to bear as He bore. I have spoken thus far generally: let me transfer the case, my Reverend Brethren, at once to your own experience. There have been times in the lives of most of those I am now addressing—I know not why I should doubt

(1) 1 John i. 5.

(2) John i. 9.

(3) Matt. v. 8.

that there are many here whose whole lives would bear the record—but times, at least, when the one undivided wish of your heart has been, in every action and every thought, to labour for your risen Lord. I appeal to those gracious seasons. Has it not been, *then*, that all the opportunities of a *painful* ministry, as His was, have been gladly seized; that the less prominent of the ministerial labours,—the catechising the young,—the visiting the sick, the care—the diligent, anxious care—for individual souls, as one by one the plough of the Great Husbandman passed over them, and prepared them for your spiritual toil,—that these have been followed with all the zeal which the more prominent and self-exalting ones have at other times received?

Has it not been then, that all the paradoxes of a *suffering* ministry as His, and His Apostles', was, have at once received their solution in you; that "sorrowful," perhaps, you were yet "always rejoicing;"¹ or "poor," yet "making many rich;" or "having nothing, yet seeming to possess all things;" content with your position because you felt it was fixed by Him; accepting thankfully its difficulties as the appointed trials of your faith? And when, day by day, those you have laboured for have opposed you with their "contradictions," have you not found it easy,—how easy, before, you could have scarcely thought,—to endure as he endured, not "striving,"² but "as the servant of the Lord gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves?" Add to this, then, that at such gracious seasons, when a momentary perplexity has arisen,—some question of duty to be determined, or some seeming advantage to be weighed,—conscience has at once rung out her clear, sharp note, "this is the way, walk in it,"³ and has been as instantly obeyed; making you bold for Christ, willing to dare, or do, or risk all

(1) 2 Cor. vi. 10.

(2) 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25.

(3) Isaiah xxx. 21.

for Him ;—and what does it all amount to but this, that whatever of true “ light ” there has been in our ministerial path, the light of wisdom, of holiness, of peace, it has been the result of *singleness of aim* ;—that if the one were constant the other would pour in upon us as a flood, our “ whole body would be full of light ?

And that light can never be hid. The example of such a life reflects itself back upon the flock we have to feed. They look at what we are more closely than they care to listen to what we teach. Imperceptibly they are led to imitate it. So would a work be growing beneath our hands,—“ gold, ¹ silver, precious stones,”—to be tried indeed by the fiery trial of temptation now, and then in the day of wonders to be revealed, unburnt. So should we receive our reward. O words, surely, of deepest meaning to those that can receive them, “ Light is sown for the righteous, and joyful gladness for such as are *true of heart* !”² O promise most full of hope to those who labour for an eternal reward, “ They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever !”³

2. But a darker vision remains to be considered. Singleness of aim is lost, or never attained ; the influencing motive becomes evil ; and then, the “ whole course is full of darkness.”

It is darkness of *teaching*. There is no spiritual discernment to detect the hidden meaning of Scripture, and so its truths are not perceived. There may be indeed the safeguard of creeds to preserve from open heresy, but the orthodoxy which they enforce is a cold and barren one. The stereotyped formulas of party take the place of the “ proportion of faith :” what will please is regarded more than “ to declare the whole counsel of God.” And so, with truth first tampered with, not “ re-

(1) 1 Cor. iii. 12, 13.

(2) Psalm xcvii. 11.

(3) Dan. xii. 3.

ceived in the love of it," and then by the judicial act of God ceasing to appear truth, we are allowed in some shape or other, "to believe a lie;" or, for "the doctrine which is according to godliness," are substituted "dotings about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh,"—how much, it were well to reflect, of *the bitterness* and harsh judgments which have found their way into the controversies of our own day might be referred to the self-love which has mingled with them in the guise of love for truth,—“whereof cometh envy, strifes, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds.”¹

It is darkness of *sin*. Of sin mixing itself up with every act of the daily life. Of holy offices profaned; of the name of God taken in vain; as our several motives may develop themselves, of bosom sins bringing us into captivity; of ease and sloth creeping over the life of one and paralysing his ministerial usefulness; of vainglory puffing up another and bringing him into condemnation; of intense longings for the honour which cometh of men; and all the darkness of disquietude which follows on these,—if disappointed of discontent, if gratified of pride; of envy at the success of others, of rivalry, of hate; the impatience of results, too, to our labours; the despondency if these are delayed, the self-gratulation if achieved; and, withal, the inconsistencies, which in spite of every effort to preserve appearances will mark the path of the double-minded man,—“unstable in all his ways.” It is this which, taking its rise from infinitely small beginnings, spreads as a leprosy over the ministerial life, till “the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint,” and he who should have been “a burning and a shining light in the midst of a perverse generation,” becomes a stumbling-block to the brethren to cause them to offend.

(1) 1 Tim. vi. 4.

But it is, beyond all, the darkness of *self-deception*. “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”¹ Awful words to the professor of godliness at all times! Most awful to us, whose familiarity with holy things may so easily bear the semblance of the actings of a holy life; the perfunctory performance of a worldly profession so readily pass for the faithful discharge of a heavenly calling! It is this darkness, more than all others, to which the text alludes,—“if the light that is in thee be darkness *how great* is that darkness.” How thick the gloom, how impossible to retrace the steps, when the voice of God within us has been first disregarded, then silenced, then has seemed to encourage us in the way of our own choosing.

So was it with *Balaam*. Commanded not go, and trying to evade the command; then permitted; then, after providential warning, seemingly encouraged to go, he ran eagerly after an earthly reward, yet did not the less indulge his hope of a heavenly one. “The word that the Lord putteth in my mouth that will I speak”²—“Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his,”³—at the very time when God had forsaken him, and he was “having” the reward for which his deceived heart had turned aside.

So was it with *Judas*. He listened to the Saviour’s words, he lived in his daily presence; he had the light, but he did not follow it; and it became to him the thick veil to blind him to his true condition. He began with petty pilfering, and spoke of his zeal for the poor. He betrayed the Lord, and justified it to himself,—we cannot doubt,—by some supposed religious necessity. All was darkness, self-deceit, till one lurid flash of light came and lit up the depths of his darkened soul,—“I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood,”⁴

(1) Prov. xiv. 12.

(2) Numbers xxii. 38.

(3) Numbers xxiii. 10.

(4) Matt. xxvii. 4.

—and passed away again in a moment, to leave him in the blackness of despair for ever.

So may it be with us. The time has not gone by when the minister of Christ,—“the man whose eyes are open,”—who, it may be, has once seen the light, is tempted by worldly aims, and little by little gives place to them, till in the sight of all but himself—Mammon, and not God,—worldly treasure, not heavenly, is the lord of his affections;—and worse ! far worse ! when those who should be “examples to the believers of *purity*,” may be seen abandoning themselves to the tyranny of a governing lust,—“making the Lord’s people to transgress,”—themselves alone unconscious of the depth of their degradation, and the fearfulness of their sin.

Reverend and dear Brethren, these are the dangers, which in some shape or other, without the closest watchfulness, lie before us all. Bear with me then for a few moments longer while I remind you of one or two particulars in which this watchfulness should be chiefly exercised.

And, first, let there be a *constant scrutiny* of our motives. Chiefly, indeed, of the sincerity of our own love for Christ. All is lost if there be defect there. But, then, of the lower aims which may be imperceptibly taking the place of this. For this there must be habits of regular retirement from the world. Seasons of special retreat there well might be for the furtherance of such a work. But, if not these, ordinary seasons the more carefully improved; seasons of sacramental preparation; times of rest when we withdraw ourselves awhile from our labour; times of sickness when God withdraws us,—and when the retrospect of our lives will tell us what their general tenour has been; times above all of *stated, daily, retirement*, when the first beginnings of any particular defection may, at once, be perceived. And if the pressing calls of an active life be urged as an objection to this, the answer is not far to seek; there is no life of

effective activity without retirement ; the very urging of the objection is perhaps the strongest proof of the necessity of the rule.

And then, secondly, the presence of inferior motive once discovered, or the very tendencies to it perceived, let the course be a prompt and decided one,—to *set ourselves to mortify it*. That prayer will be the first essential to this all will see,—long and patient wrestling with God in prayer it will have to be, as the roots of the evil tendency are the more deeply struck : but besides this there must be the constant efforts of a vigilant self-controul. It may be that the very exercise of natural gifts may have for a while to be restrained ; lawful gratifications to be declined ; opportunities which others may freely accept without detriment to their moral nature, by us to be passed by,—till “ every high thing is cast down, and every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” ¹

But the time will come, when, beneath such a discipline, self is crushed, and He firmly enthroned in our hearts ; and then we may go forth, unshaken by the world’s applause, undazzled by its gifts, to lay out every talent for Him and His glorious work,—able to say with one of old, “ God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world.” ²

And, lastly, in all, and with all this, let us keep continually before us the realities of the promised reward. “ Who is that faithful and wise servant whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season ? blessed is that servant whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing, verily I say unto you, he will make him ruler over all his goods.” ³ To be a ruler in heaven ! To receive “ a prophet’s reward ” ! Who can estimate aright the greatness of the prize ?

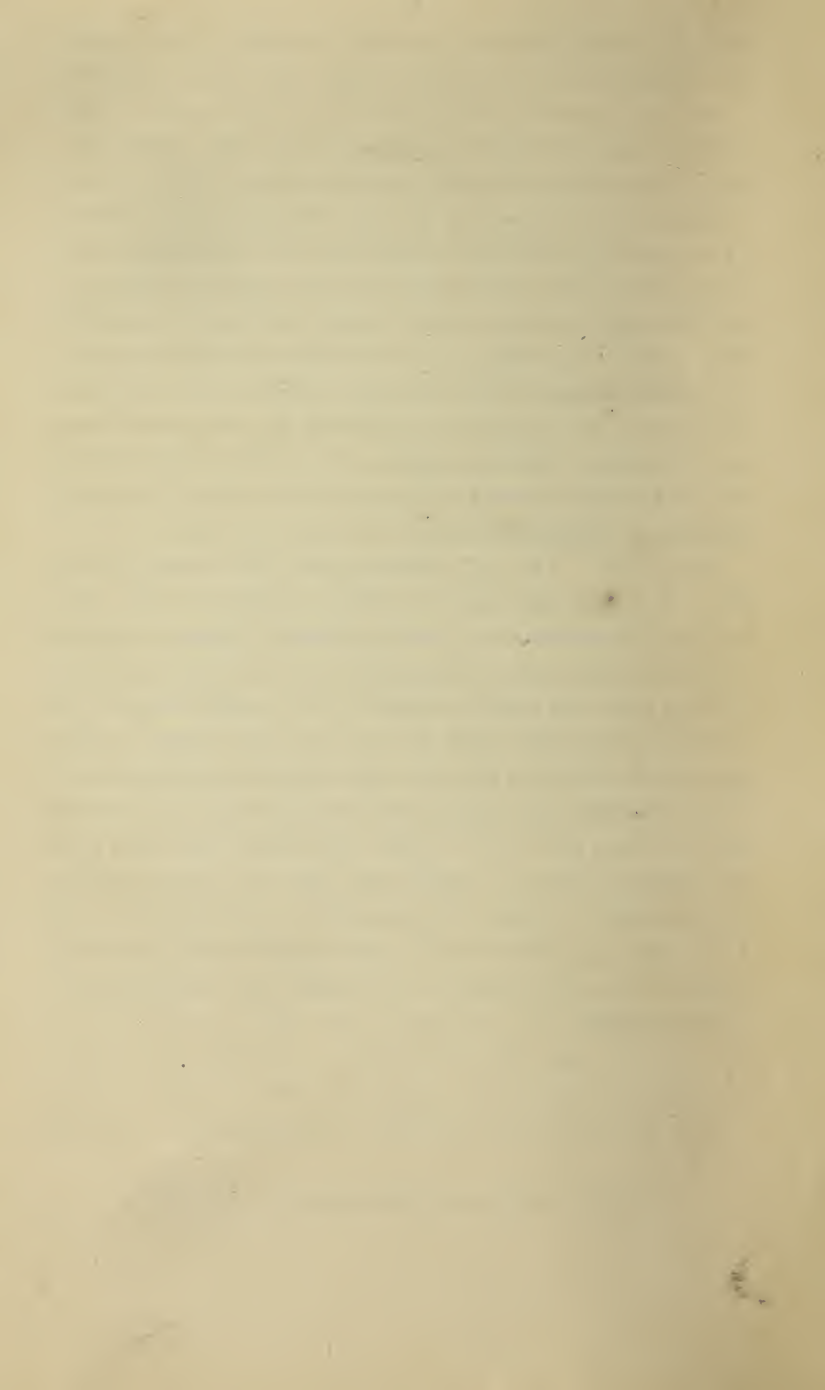
[1] 2 Cor. x. 5.

[2] Gal. vi. 14.

[3] Matt. xxiv. 45.

Brethren in the Lord Jesus, you who, erewhile, have struggled with the mysteries of your moral being ; who have recognised in the very temptations that beset you—in the soarings of the intellect, the intensity of earthly passion, the cravings for power, the covetings of wealth,—the last faint trace of a principle that once was divine ; the principle heavenly, that it reached out to something above and beyond itself ; the application of it corrupt, that it had turned aside from its legitimate object ;—meditate, often meditate, on the “ glory that shall be revealed.” There shall be knowledge and power, there, that shall amply satisfy ; riches, there, that shall bring no sorrow ; love, there, that shall fill the soul. But they are reserved for those who, here, have returned, in Christ, to the true aims of their first creation ; who in Him have learned to discipline their intellect, and consecrate their powers, and restore their love,—*to God*.

Life is short. The day is hastening on. To us most blessed time, if, when “ labours ” are being brought to light, and hearts are being laid bare, and the shallow judgments of this world are being reversed—many that were last found to be first, and first last—and to the unfaithful and worldly servants, not the plea of wonderful works that they may have done, not the presence of souls that they have been instrumental in saving—of the flock that had applauded their labours, or the crowds that had hung upon their words—will avail to save them from the Pharisees’ doom, “ Verily I say unto you they *have had* their reward,”—we who are gathered here, you who listen and I who speak, should be found to have been “ faithful in our few things ” here, and so fitted to be “ rulers over many things ” in His kingdom.



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